Mentorship-driven Talent Management
To date, studies of cultural differences between Western and Eastern models of mentoring have been sporadic. Payal Kumar and Pawan Budhwar have assembled eleven substantive chapters in which authors offer unique organizational case studies, as well as qualitative and quantitative studies of mentoring relationships in countries including India, Thailand, China, Japan, Pakistan, Indonesia, Malaysia and Bangladesh. This is a ‘must read’ for scholars and practitioners who claim to be experts on mentoring in a global context.

Dr Kathy E. Kram  
Shipley Professor in Management Emerita  
Boston University Questrom School of Business, USA

Although mentoring is a critical developmental relationship, the field has been constrained by Euro-Western approaches and ideologies. This fine volume offers mentoring scholars needed insights into the unique experiences of mentoring within Asian contexts.

Dr Belle Rose Ragins  
Sheldon B Lubar Professor of Management  
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, USA

Asian societies are high power distance in nature. I am delighted that Professors Kumar and Budhwar focus their book on mentoring in Asia, where respect and reverence are the norms and mentoring is much more than offering advance on career development. This edited volume offers unique insights into mentoring relationships across several Asian countries.

Dr Eddy Ng  
James and Elizabeth Freeman Professor of Management  
Bucknell University, Canada

This book unravels the dynamics of mentoring across various Asian cultures, from academic and practitioner perspectives. It brings to the fore contexts that have so far been given scant visibility in mentoring research. As such, the book brings fresh ideas and perspectives to developmental relationships, thereby validating, questioning, challenging and importantly putting in context the existing theories and frameworks of mentoring.

Dr Aarti Ramaswami  
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Mentorship-driven Talent Management: The Asian Experience

EDITED BY

PAYAL KUMAR
BML Munjal University, India

PAWAN BUDHWAR
Aston University, UK
To Professors Stacy Blakebeard, Simmons College (USA) – a friend and a trusted mentor, and Manish Singhal, XLRI (India) – thesis advisor and mentor (Payal Kumar)

To Professors Paul Sparrow, RD Pathak and Michael West (Pawan Budhwar)

To all those who believe in the significance of mentoring in present-day organizations.
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As I write this Foreword, I come straight from a meeting of senior coaches in Africa. The subject? How to escape from the cultural dominance by Western society of the concepts, theories and overall debate around coaching and mentoring. It’s a discussion I frequently find across the Asian region, too. While the words coach and mentor have their origins in Europe and have been given radically different interpretations from these origins in the United States in recent decades, the principles that underpin developmental dialogue belong to many cultures and often find their richest expression in the Asian region, from the gurus of India, to the Buddhist traditions of the Himalayan kingdoms, Southeast Asia and Japan.

In my recent travels in Central Asia, I was struck by the impact of medieval scholars, such as the astronomer Ulum Beg, grandson of Tamerlane, who stimulated learning as a way of life. A recurrent theme I observe in all the Asian cultures I have engaged with – brought home in particular in dialogue with monks in Laos and Myanmar – is that knowledge and self-knowledge are inseparable in creating a whole person. This is also the core of mentoring: by raising the level of self-awareness and awareness of the world around us, we are able to have powerful learning dialogues that link these worlds.

This diffusion of conceptual bases for mentoring is both a strength (in that people throughout the region can immediately associate with the core principles of listening, questioning and reflection) and a weakness because it opens the door for imposed definitions from other cultures. The word ‘mentoring’ is a relatively recent creation from the Anglo-Saxon world. The word ‘mentor’ comes from a character in The Odyssey. Although a dictionary definition of mentor is ‘a wise man’, the old man Mentor was by and large an incompetent. I am struck by the similarities with Nasiruddin, the wise fool of Central Asian culture. The ‘real’ mentor was Athena, the Goddess of Wisdom, who allowed Odysseus to make mistakes, then sat with him to help him reflect and learn from his experiences. In effect, she used her wisdom to help him become wiser in turn. This role has much in common with that of a sage or guru in Asian cultures.

Athena had multiple personalities, resulting from the merging of many gods into one. In her role as Goddess of Martial Arts she was a brutal, vengeful bringer of retribution. US scholars in the 1960s and 1970s failed to appreciate the subtlety of these contrasting personae and lumped them into one. The result was that the mentoring role of stimulating wisdom became overshadowed by the largely incompatible role of a powerful and influential sponsor – someone, who took
action on the behalf of a protégé (someone who was protected). It is interesting to note that this culturally biased interpretation of mentoring occurred at a time when the United States was pre-occupied with exercising its power and authority around the world. With cultural dominance comes the power to influence language – even in this book, which aims to be thought-liberating, some contributors refer to protégé rather than more accurate mentee (one who is helped to think).

In doing so, the US scholars also ignored the more recent history and evolution of mentoring, in which the French cleric Fenelon, appointed tutor to the son of Louis the XIV, continued the dialogues of Athena, the goddess of wisdom, with Odysseus’ son, in a book titled simply Telemachus. One of the first books on leadership of modern times, and translated into many languages, it established the principles of reflective dialogue as the key to developing wise leaders.

In co-editing the book Coaching and Mentoring in Asia-Pacific – a project designed to illustrate the diversity of indigenous approaches within the region – my respect for the insights to be gained from Asian perspectives (in all their diversity) has deepened. For example, while I have researched and written on the role of laughter in learning dialogue, I had never comprehended the complexity of smiling as a vehicle to steer the conversation, until introduced to the concepts by a colleague in Thailand, where subtle variations in smiling may convey multiple meanings.

Engaging with other cultural traditions reveals that mentoring and coaching are complex, multi-faceted constructions heavily influenced by local traditions and cultural assumptions. For example:

- Many Asian cultures have a built-in reverence for age that both encourages people to seek to explore issues with someone older and wiser and at the same time inhibits open challenge from the younger person to the older. Good mentoring practice in Asia-Pacific therefore involves encouraging the younger person to challenge themselves. In contrast, there is an implicit assumption in much of Western mentoring that the mentor (or coach) does the challenging. My own practice has been enriched by recognizing that I have a choice in which of these routes I take.

- The simplistic Goal, Reality, Options and Will model popularized in Western coaching and often advocated in mentoring starts from the assumption that the person seeking help knows what they want and simply needs support in how to get there. One of the reasons GROW has been discredited is that effective coaching and mentoring result in changes of perception and identity that substantially change the person’s goals – so rigid pursuit of an initial goal is both pointless and potentially harmful. By contrast, one of my Chinese supervisees brought to me the case of a client, who typifies a perspective found commonly in the region. The client begins the learning dialogue by describing, bit by bit, the circumstances and context of an issue not yet defined. Working round it, meandering through the landscape of the issue, the client and the mentor both develop insights into the multiple systems in play. By the time the issue clarifies into a goal, the choices and decisions to be made are already evident. There are pluses and minuses with both of these approaches, but I conclude that the
greatest value lies in being able to step outside the rigidity of a single, culturally
bounded approach and work with wherever the client is coming from.

***

It is heartening to see the chapters in this pioneering volume present a diversity of
national and cultural perspectives along with a range of applications. This edited
volume has been divided into three themes: country reviews, perspectives and case
studies (which will be useful to use in teaching purposes). The country reviews of
Indonesia, Japan and Thailand (Chapters 2, 3 and 4) are important stepping
stones towards creating and valuing national identities for mentoring. Gender-
based mentoring and reverse mentoring (Chapters 6 and 8, studies from Malaysia
and India) have emerged as major forces for social change. Other chapters
emphasize issues that are of particular significance in an Asian economic context
– for example, Chapter 9 explores mentoring in the context of family businesses in
Bangladesh, a relatively unexplored theme in the Western world. Other countries
that are covered are China and Pakistan. There is an also an interesting
perspective of the challenges in India faced by a female European coach.

For a mentor or mentor trainer in Asia, it cannot be healthy to allow their
practice to be defined solely by cultural assumptions from the West – not least,
because so much ‘good practice’ can be challenged on the basis of lack of
evidence. For example, the notion that coaches and mentors should take copious
notes flies in the face of all the evidence from research into attentiveness and
neuroscience. (It also puts the power of the relationship firmly in the hands of the
mentor, not the mentee.)

One of the reasons for the sudden rapid emergence of an Asia-Pacific chapter
of the European Coaching and Mentoring Council is pushback by serious prac-
titioners against formulaic approaches to accreditation and standards by the
largest of the global professional bodies in the field.¹ The great danger with
standardization at a global level is that it marginalizes the majority of cultures,
expecting them to conform to the mores of one or two dominant cultures.
Contextual differences are there and need to be acknowledged and respected.

Equally, it cannot be healthy for Western mentors and coaches, or the research
communities built around them, to ignore the wealth of insights into learning
dialogue from other cultures, nor to discount the value of diversity of approach.
Indeed, not to do so is a negation of two of the core principles of mentoring –
curiosity about other world views, seeking diverse perceptions that open up
different choices.

Hence the importance of this book. It is not enough just to challenge the
cultural dominance of coaching and mentoring by the West, which is what I have
been saying for long (Clutterbuck, Kochan, Lunsford, Dominguez, & Haddock-
Millar, 2017). It is equally important to engage in dialogue that can benefit
mentoring practice in all parts of the world. This edited volume – the first of its
kind – does just that. Kudos to the volume editors Prof. Payal Kumar and

¹The oldest of the professional bodies in the field of coaching and mentoring, created in
1991 to bring together academics and practitioners.
Prof. Pawan Budhwar for taking the pains to bring out this volume on Asian mentoring experiences. In effective mentoring, all parties learn. Indeed, one of the most accurate measures of mentoring quality is how much of a learning exchange has taken place. It is, in my view, imperative that we maintain this principle of collaborative learning across cultures in the development of mentoring practice, in accreditation, in research and in how we build the global mentoring community. Anything less would be hypocritical!

David Clutterbuck, July 2019

Professor Clutterbuck, a leading global authority on coaching and mentoring, has authored 70 books. He is the Special Ambassador, European Mentoring and Coaching Council; and Visiting Professor, Henley Business School, UK.

Reference